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TAGS: [KPAL](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IS](#) [SY](#)  
SUBJECT: HAMAS MEMBER TARGETED IN CAR BOMBING

REF: DAMASCUS 5689

Classified By: DCM Stephen Seche, for reasons 1.4 b/d

¶1. (C) Summary: On December 13, a car bomb exploded in the Old Mezzeh section of Damascus, wounding some passers-by but apparently killing no one. Media contacts confirmed that the target of the bombing was Mesbah Abu Hweileh, a Palestinian HAMAS official residing in Damascus. Interior Minister Ghazi Kanaan appeared on Syrian television the evening of December 13, claiming that the Mossad was behind the bombing. End Summary.

¶2. (C) At approximately 1300 on December 13, a car bomb went off in the commercial district of Old Mezzeh, approximately 1.5 miles from the Embassy. A number of passers-by were reportedly injured by flying glass, and Syrians present at the scene mentioned to both RSO and A/ARMA that a woman had been killed in the blast; however, no deaths have been confirmed by authorities or by the press. According to press contacts, the car belonged to HAMAS member Mesbah Abu Hweileh, who was in Old Mezzeh with his daughter and wife, on their way to a dentist appointment. The bomb apparently detonated shortly after they had exited the vehicle.

¶3. (C) AP reporter Albert Aji told Poloff that he spoke to HAMAS' deputy political bureau chief Moussa Abu Marzouk, who told Aji that he believed the Mossad organized the bombing. Interior Minister Ghazi Kanaan claimed as much in a statement that aired on Syrian television the evening of December 13 and was picked up by all of the Arabic satellite stations. Comment: Kanaan's appearance on television immediately after the bombings to state the Syrian point of view is a departure from the normal veil of silence that ensues after major incidents of this sort, and may be a further indication of increasing SARG openness to a more liberal media environment. End comment.

¶4. (C) Note: This is the second time a HAMAS official residing on Syrian soil has been targeted this year; on September 26, HAMAS leader Ezzedine Sheikh Khalil was killed in a car bombing (reftel).

¶5. (C) Comment: While Israel has neither denied nor claimed responsibility for either incident, the target and timing of each could be indicative of a "tit-for-tat" approach on the part of Israel, which may be conducting operations in Syria in response to Palestinian attacks in the Territories. The September 26 Khalil assassination, for example, came weeks after twin suicide bombings in southern Israel, while the December 13 Mezzeh car bomb incident came several days after the joint HAMAS/Fatah-orchestrated attack on an Israeli army outpost near Rafah on the Gaza-Egypt border. End Comment.

SCOBAY